

**TESTIMONY, COMMITTEE ON HOUSE ADMINISTRATION
March 17, 2001
ANN ESCHINGER, PRESIDENT
LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF ARIZONA**

Arizona supports campaign finance reform.

We are one of four states that has passed public funding for elections. The law went into effect for the November 2000 election cycle. The only statewide race then was for Arizona Corporation Commission. I am proud to say that three of the four major party candidates for two seats ran with public funding. This means that the two Republicans elected to the Commission have not accepted campaign contributions from the industries they regulate.

In the legislative races 44 candidates ran with public funding and 16 were elected. Now almost half of Arizona's legislative districts have a legislator who is free of the influence of special interest money.

Our system is designed to remove the influence of big money campaign contributions on state government. It encourages competition and increases public dialogue. And, certainly not least, it increases the choices that voters have at the polls by enabling qualified candidates of all political persuasions to run for office.

The two bills in the Arizona Legislature this session that would have effectively gutted public campaign financing are dead. One received only the vote of the sponsor in committee.

The Arizona Republic, which would be described by most as the "voice of Arizona's conservative conscience," supports McCain/Feingold. There is no love lost between the paper and Senator McCain but, in commenting on the hundreds of millions of

dollars raised by Republicans and Democrats last year, the Republic said that this money “is corrupting and feeds the public perception that our elected officials are for sale.” The Republic knows that this issue is bigger than John McCain.

We in Arizona also understand that meaningful campaign finance reform is not just about politicians and money. It is about a more representative decision-making process.

The League of Women Voters understands that true reform must correct the dangerous imbalance between the access and influence of big money contributors in determining public policy versus that of the average voter. True reform must help restore the faith of the public that they have a voice in our representative democracy. It must help erase the cynicism and voter apathy so prevalent today so that more citizens will be encouraged to participate in the political process.

McCain/Feingold is a step in this direction. It will effectively ban soft money, ensure that funding for “sham issue” advocacy is covered by election rules, and strengthen enforcement and disclosure. The League of Women Voters opposes amendments to the bill since they will undermine the bipartisan coalition supporting the bill. We oppose provisions that may be offered to raise the “hard money” contribution limits. It is only people who have maxed out on direct, traceable contributions to candidates and people and groups who want to hide identities through anonymous contributions laundered through political parties that benefit from the ability to wage soft money campaigns.

A balanced, bipartisan approach to federal campaign finance reform, one which focuses on banning soft money and closing the fake issue ad loophole, is our nation’s best chance to restore citizen confidence in our political system.